

AN INTERVIEW WITH RICK WALKER

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Keywords: history: Rick Walker.

The ICPS Board wanted to honor Rick Walker for his long service to the ICPS and to the broader carnivorous plant community. What better way (OK, legally and within budget) than with an article about his experiences with carnivores? As the President of the ICPS, it was my pleasure to ask Rick about his involvement with the ICPS and his interest in carnivorous plants. Included is the requisite “I killed a Venus Flytrap with hamburger” story. It may be reassuring to see that someone as experienced and important to the ICPS as Rick has, or at least had, carnivorous feet of clay, just like the rest of us.

ICPS: How and when did you get involved in carnivorous plants?

Rick: My first grade teacher, Mrs. Ida Foster, grew a VFT every year in her class. I was so fascinated by her plant that she let me take it home at the end of the year. Of course at age 6 I pretty quickly killed it with bits of hamburger and flies. Good horticultural information was hard to find in 1965. However, the wonder of the VFT has stuck with all my life. When I finally graduated from school, got a job and little disposable time and cash, I decided to finally learn how to grow these plants and keep them alive and thriving.

ICPS: How did you get into the carnivorous plant listserv?

Rick: I started trading plants with a few friends by mail. I think Robert Allen told me about an informal email group in 1991. This led me to a half-dozen carnivorous plant enthusiasts that had been manually sending emails to each other for about a year. The original group consisted of Barry Rice, Don Burden, Michael Chamberland, Rob Maharajh, John Taylor, Robert Allen, Doug Atlas and Davin Stewart. By the time I got involved in late 1991, the group had grown to a few dozen people and it was starting to get tedious to manage the mailing list by hand. I offered to run a listserv program to make it easier for the group to expand. The list doubled in size every year from 1990 until 1998 until it reached its present stable size of about 1000 members, which interestingly, is about the same as the ICPS itself.

I believe that good communication is the foundation of peaceful and well-operating world. The CP listserv was my idealistic contribution towards fostering communication in the carnivorous plant microcosm. Of course, the CP listserv has had lots of good exchanges and heated debates and, yes, even a bit of name-calling. However, with very rare exceptions, all these conflicts have sorted themselves out without any need for moderation or censorship.

ICPS: How did the CP database come about?

Rick: In those days, it was hard to get good information or pictures of the new plants that were being traded. One of my first projects with the group was to put together a master growlist of all the people that were on the list. Looking for a definitive list of valid carnivorous plant names eventually led me to Jan Schlauer and his taxonomic list which at that time was only available as a xeroxed handout. In November 1994, Jan and I used his list to create the Carnivorous Plant Database now at http://www.omnisterra.com/bot/cp_home.cgi. The CP database hosts a good collection of donated pictures of carnivorous plants, monographs and other contributed items.

ICPS: What was it like to be the first ICPS president?

Rick: Being well-known for running the CP listserv probably contributed to my winning the first presidential election. It was really fun to work with Don Schnell, Joe Mazrimas and Leo Song who had published Carnivorous Plant Newsletter as a labor of love since 1972. My goal was to move the ICPS into a 501(c)(3) non-profit status and to increase its membership participation and scientific status. We expanded the editors, adding Jan Schlauer and Barry Rice, making CPN

a refereed journal. A big effort was made to improve our ability to accurately handle new memberships.

There were a few tough times where we actually worried about the ICPS going bankrupt. One year we got behind in Carnivorous Plant Newsletter publishing and only published 3 issues. California has a law saying that a club journal is only non-taxable if it is published 4 or more times in a year. Since we published just 3, we were liable for sales tax on all the journals for that year. Since Carnivorous Plant Newsletter had always been run hand-to-mouth, this caused us a huge amount of grief before we were finally able to settle back taxes.

My happiest time as President was attending the first ICPS International Conference in 1997 at Atlanta Botanical Gardens in Georgia. Meeting so many members from around the world was thrilling. The French carnivorous plants society gave me a little plaque of postage stamps depicting carnivorous plants from around the world signed by their members who attended the '97 conference.

ICPS: What other things would you like people to know about you or what would you like to say?

Rick: I've really enjoyed everyone I've ever met through the ICPS and my interest in carnivorous plants. It supports my idea that the world would be nicer place if we all did more gardening. Receiving a VFT as a first grader really impacted my life, and I hope my contributions have helped others to enjoy carnivorous plants too.

I encourage everyone to help reduce our footprint on the planet. Carnivorous plants, like most other non-human organisms, are in dramatic decline planet-wide. The only way forward that I can see is for us to reduce all of our energy and resource usage by at least 10:1. As an engineer, I'm putting a lot of thought into how to do this. Everyone needs to help wherever they can. We can all support appropriate legislation and efficiency improvements as they become available. Please continue to share the wonder of the natural world through carnivorous plants, and help everyone to see that nature is worth saving.

LITERATURE REVIEWS

By John Brittnacher and Jan Schlauer

Kurata, S. 2008. *Nepenthes peltata* (Nepenthaceae), a new species of pitcher plant from the Philippines. *Journal of the Insectivorous Plant Society (Japan)* 59: 12-17 (2008).

The new species, originally found in the Mt. Hamiguitan Range, Mindanao, has peltate leaf apices, ovoid pitchers, and a basal crest and unusually large nectar glands on the interior lid surface. This combination of characters distinguishes *N. peltata* from similar species but makes precise placement in the genus difficult. The author considers it a member of the *N. villosa* group as defined by Jebb & Cheek (*Flora Malesiana* 15, 2001). (JS)

Walter, R.C., and Merritts, D.J. 2008. Natural Streams and the Legacy of Water-Powered Mills. *Science* 319: 299-304.

This article does not mention carnivorous plants or any particular plants. But it does present research about what the upland habitats of the Atlantic states of the USA were like before Europeans descended on North America. Today typical valleys in the Appalachians and adjacent uplands are characterized by deep, relatively dry, alluvial soils with meandering stream cuts to bedrock or gravel. In the 17th through 19th century, colonists from Europe built more than 65,000 dams to provide water power for mills. Walter and Merritts documented that alluvial soils in many of the valleys are less than 300 years old and result from silting of the millponds behind the dams. They found the ancestral conditions were wetlands with minimal soil but what soil was there was composed of relatively high levels of peat and mosses. The implications of this are that before European settlement and the damming of the streams, carnivorous plants could have been much more widespread in the USA Atlantic states. (JB)